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Osaka University

言語文化共同研究プロジェクト2020

英語教育におけるグローバリゼーション

日 野 信 行
小 口 一 郎
小 田 節 子
服 部 拓 哉

大阪大学大学院言語文化研究科

2021

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まえがき

本論集は、大阪大学における共同研究プロジェクト「英語教育におけるグローバリゼーション」 (*Globalization in English Language Teaching*) の報告書である。社会のグローバル化に対応するための英語教育の諸側面を論じている。

英語教育の社会的貢献が求められる今日、本報告書が英語教育の研究と実践に対して有益な示唆をもたらすことを願う。

(日野信行)

2021 年 3 月 31 日

英語教育におけるグローバリゼーション

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Managing university-wide online English language courses: An interim report

Ichiro Koguchi

1. Introduction

English language curricula at Japanese universities have been undergoing fundamental revision. This development is largely shaped and accelerated by two factors: the globalisation of society and the advent of information and communication technology (ICT). Formerly, in much of the country, teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) adopted a conservative approach relying on the traditional grammar-translation method. This method has its rationale and has been instrumental in importing scientific, industrial, and academic achievements of the West (Hino, 2018). It is reasonable that trust in the traditional approach was not seriously destabilised up until the late twentieth century. Globalisation and ICT, however, fundamentally changed the educational context, bringing about a fundamental review and redefining methodology and practice in the field of EFL in this country.

Globalisation calls for communicative skills in English to be shared widely among the general public, as English is regarded as a lingua franca. In the past, in Japan, English was often considered an intellectual attainment of smaller, specialized groups, with primary emphasis on competence in reading. However, as the country gradually opened itself to internationalisation, a variety of ideas and plans of educational reform were proposed. Thus, when the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) issued the “English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization” in 2014, it was widely recognised that the Ministry was taking a major step forward in breaking with tradition. This brief document, focusing principally on elementary and secondary education, advances a “New English Education,” which clearly sets communicative skills as the primary objective of learning and requires English to be taught in English without recourse to Japanese as the means of instruction and redefines learning goals in accordance with the internationally approved “Can-do” scales employed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

MEXT’s initiative of reform has been extended to higher education. Already in 2009, the Ministry had begun implementing a plan to more than double the number of overseas students in Japanese universities (MEXT, 2009). This policy, primarily aimed at increasing international student enrollments, seeks at the same time to improve the mindset of Japanese students by acclimatising them to diverse cultures and languages on their home campuses. Thus, in a subsequent document, “Higher Education in Japan” (2014), MEXT urges universities to introduce English-based degree courses, as well as individual classes taught in English, with a view for Japanese universities to educate those from overseas in English, initially in exclusive groups, but ultimately alongside domestic students. This direction entails the reform of EFL curricula to nurture students’ communicative skills, beyond the traditional focus on grammar-translation and reading. This movement is facilitated and motivated

by the advent of ICT.

ICT has been applied in language teaching for quite some time; its efficacy is recognised internationally and domestically. As Alizadeh (2019) argues, digital technology is beneficial to education in several ways: it motivates learning and positively impacts study outcomes by enabling access to materials without spatial-temporal constraints and facilitating communication not just among learners, but between learners and the instructor as well. Alizadeh specifically adduces ICT's significance for language education, stating that having been established in EFL as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), it holds an important place in the agenda of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT) and has been highlighted in one of the recent national educational policy reform proposals (MEXT, 2011).

Osaka University, whose EFL reform is the subject of the current article, has played no small part in this trend. In 2001, the university opened four CALL labs. The number and size of these facilities were gradually expanded, and at one time, the university operated no fewer than ten labs, altogether capable of accommodating more than 400 users. Subsequently, the role of CALL labs has partly been taken over by the practice of BYOD (bring your own device), i.e. learners' own devices used as study terminals through campus Wi-Fi networks. The university's commitment to guaranteeing a quality ICT environment for language learning thus remains in place, though in modified form.

Along with its provision of ICT facilities, Osaka University has experimented with online English courses since as early as 2006 (Koguchi et al, 2008). For over a decade from 2006, two to four English classes based on autonomous learning via computer networks were offered each year as official credit courses. Then in its new curriculum introduced in 2019, the university implemented two compulsory English language courses based on independent study online. One of these is to be taken in the Fall-Winter semester by all freshmen, and the other in the Spring-Summer semester by all sophomores. Online English lessons themselves are not uncommon. Some universities have credit courses, but usually they offer elective classes (Tohoku University), supplementary training as part of the teaching of regular classes (Nagoya University), or special courses for those who failed face-to-face classes in the designated semester (Kyoto University). Other universities have only one compulsory online course (Hokkaido University and Kyushu University). Osaka University's curriculum is thus uniquely ambitious in terms of the number and compulsory nature of the courses and the number of course takers. Accordingly, the university's curriculum deserves the attention of those interested in this method of teaching for the experiential data, insights, and lessons it affords. In the following sections, I shall give an overview of the current state of online EFL teaching overall, before discussing Osaka University's educational attempt.

2. Online Language Teaching: An Overview

Online teaching is part of the latest development of tertiary education in its “universal access”

phase (Andrade, 2015; Trow, 2005). EFL constitutes one of the rapidly growing areas of this teaching approach. Like other disciplines, teaching English online is not a simple proposition. It involves a number of factors related to pedagogy, technological readiness, and the availability of facilities and devices, as well as learner motivation. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of this complex approach. While compiled from the data and insights of several earlier studies, much of this review is indebted to J. Chen's recent study (Chen, 2020).

Online teaching has its roots in distance learning via postal mail. This was a largely one-way communication in which the teacher side sent study materials that the receiver side, the student, completed following the instructions given by the instructor. In recent years, the advent of the Internet has afforded two-way communication via email, bulletin boards, and blogs, and video-conferencing systems have realised synchronous online learning at low cost. Meanwhile, the development of learning management systems (LMSs) has made it possible to post and distribute materials, monitor students' learning processes, and evaluate and record their achievement. These recent technological innovations have led to the emergence of virtual learning environments (VLE) that can replicate many classroom activities. However, online courses have their own problems. One conspicuous issue is low completion rates, and this holds true for learning English. In Chen (2020), this difficulty emerges as "the third week curse," or giving up the study in earlier weeks of the course. As this problem has been widely observed, online education research has highlighted learning support by the instructor or the system, as well as the learner's aptitude to manage their own learning.

Since the beginning of the present century, Internet-based distance learning has flourished. We have seen e-learning courses emerge in various forms and on a wide range of subjects. Some utilise specially designed online courseware, while others take advantage of existing materials on the Internet such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). In whatever form, many of these programmes are conscious of the need to help course participants to continue learning. Some courses have features to enhance learner motivation by emphasising the enjoyment of learning, and Facebook is sometimes used as a platform for communication and community-making. Moreover, some programmes provide with learning portfolios that facilitate students' reflection on their own study, and such courses often provide individual support from instructors.

No less important is, as Chen emphasises, focusing on learner autonomy. Although relatively new, this concept has already been examined from a number of perspectives. Benson (2011) has advanced a multi-dimensional description of autonomy that comprises the notion of control over three areas: "learning management, cognitive processes and learning content" (49). From the standpoint of language ecology, this notion has also been conceptualised as learners' exercise of their own agency in a learning environment or space (van Lier, 2004; Murray et al., 2014). It is often observed that some learners can effortlessly manage their online study, but others cannot do without external aid. This difference may be linked to learning outcomes both directly and indirectly, as it may influence the

motivation to learn. Therefore, it is vital for online teachers to recognise how and to what extent each course participant can exercise their autonomy in class assignments and activities.

However, providing learning support and nurturing autonomy are not always easy. Indeed, online language courses, especially those that rely heavily on learners' independent learning, do not always yield successful results. Gyamfi et al. (2019) reports on the mixed results of a Thai university course that implemented assignment-based EFL lessons using the courseware *Tell Me More*. Data from questionnaires and interviews shed light on the student behaviours that enhance or undermine the purpose of using this courseware. For instance, many course takers read the directions of lesson activities and kept trying until they arrived at the correct answer. On the other hand, quite a few skipped to new activities when facing difficulties. Some went to the answer key section when they answered incorrectly just once; others looked at the key even before starting lesson activities. It was often seen that students left the programme on in the background to pass the required time. Also, those with strong technological skills manipulated the programme to their advantage in order to satisfy the requirement of the course quickly. Recognising that students often could not control themselves properly in their self-study and that they even cheated from time to time, the authors concluded that external monitoring or control is necessary for self-study EFL lessons.

Gyamfi et al. (2019) also suggested the significance of learning goals. They recommended setting specific goals, such as proficiency test scores, for online assignments, which may help to inform students of the direct effect of studying the courseware on their language skills. Further thoughts for how to make out-of-class learning work are advanced by Lai et al. (2015). The authors refer to the significance of learning outside class by quoting earlier views that out-of-class learning is correlated positively with achievement (Nunan, 1991) and that today's learners are not as dependent on class as they used to be (Richards, 2009). Lai et al. (2015) then claim from their own research results that the nature, rather than the quantity, of out-of-class learning is associated with learning outcomes and that in-class and out-of-class learning function better if the methods or materials complement each other. A typical example is for activities outside of class to focus on meaning and communication, while in the classroom students receive grammar-oriented training.

To sum up, online language learning or teaching is an important form of education in the present day but still has a number of problems. Despite attempts to improve courseware or to help learners to manage their own learning, low completion rates still hinder satisfactory results in many instances. Some student behaviours hinder successful outcomes, and course administrators accordingly need to employ measures to restrict wayward actions by learners. Effort should be made to ensure that lessons in the classroom and out-of-class online learning qualitatively supplement each other. With these experiential insights by earlier practitioners in mind, the next section describes Osaka University's online EFL courses.

3. Osaka University's "Practical English"

In the academic year 2019, Osaka University revised its undergraduate EFL curriculum. While increasing the minimum number of credits that students were required to obtain, the pedagogical orientation was redefined and the overall curriculum structure renewed. The average class size was also reduced. Until 2018, the university offered skill-based English lessons and smaller numbers of Integrated English and Basic ESP courses. Each skill-based class specialised in reading, writing, speaking, or listening, while Integrated English offered broader-range training to prepare for proficiency tests such as the TOEFL and Basic ESP focused on English specific to each disciplinary field. Class sizes varied, but the average number of participants was large, somewhere between 45 to 50. The whole picture was that of a conventional national university curriculum, with the only noticeable deviation from the norm being the teaching of Basic ESP. The latter, however, only accounted for an eighth of the total number of required credits for each student.

The new curriculum is an across-the-board revision of the previous system. The classes are now divided into two groups: Integrated English and Practical English. Integrated English consists of five categories that reflect recent developments in the study of second language acquisition: Project-Based, Content-Based, Academic Skills, Liberal Arts & Sciences, and Performance Workshops. Participants of a Project-Based class work on research projects and make presentations based on them. Content-Based courses study academic subjects by actively using English, while Academic Skills lessons are concerned with the study skills in English necessary for academic research. Liberal Arts & Sciences focuses on reading texts in the humanities or natural science. Performance Workshops are small-size classes specialised for writing, speaking, or presentation. In Practical English, on the other hand, students learn semi-academic and academic English by independently studying through designated online courseware. Every Osaka University undergraduate has to take six Integrated and two Practical English courses during their first two years on campus. The latter courses are the chief subject of this article.

Practical English is an ambitious project in several ways. It is made up of two courses, Practical English (Introductory e-Learning) and Practical English (Advanced e-Learning). Each course accommodates approximately 3,600 participants, about 3,300 regular students and 300 re-takers who failed the previous semester. Introductory e-Learning is for freshmen and is held in the Fall-Winter semester; Advanced e-Learning is taken by sophomores in the Spring-Summer. This means that an online English course of about 3,600 participants is constantly being taught all through the academic year. Since no more than three staff members are in charge of the operation of these courses, normal teaching cannot function; the education is entirely dependent on students' autonomous learning. The teachers take the role of advisors as well as that of course administrators.

This unusual course structure was adopted for two reasons: one is administration-related and the other pedagogical. The administrative reason is the financial conditions of Japanese universities,

which have been under severe budget constraints for decades. National universities in particular are pressurised to cut costs, as grants from the government are being reduced by 1.6% every year for larger universities like Osaka University and by 1.1% for smaller institutions. Universities have no choice but to streamline every area of their activities: education, research, and administration. When those in charge of curriculum design at Osaka University thought of reducing class sizes for better education, they chose to set up self-learning credit courses that would accommodate 25% of the total English language course participants. This drastic measure has successfully reduced the average class size to just upwards of 35 for Integrated English without incurring extra costs. In this sense, the introduction of Practical English has contributed to the good of the university community.

Practical English's mass-education approach may look dubious to some EFL practitioners, but it has been pedagogically justified with reference to previous experiences. As mentioned earlier in this article, Osaka University had experimented with autonomous learning English courses before. The rationale behind these attempts included the propositions that independent learning outside class enables students to study in accordance with their own need and proficiency, that assignment-based autonomous learning nurtures learner autonomy, and that the ubiquitous learning environment of the Internet increases study time and opportunity (Koguchi et al., 2011). The experimental teaching demonstrated some of these claims, as independent learning by 70 students led to a significant improvement in their TOEIC scores. A similar attempt reported in Koguchi et al. (2012) showed that students' proficiency test scores after such autonomous study were not inferior to those of the control group taught in a normal face-to-face class.

The complementarity of different approaches is also a pedagogical consideration. Lai et al. (2015) showed that face-to-face teaching functions well if it is supplemented qualitatively by out-of-class study. Students learned better when their form-focused training in the classroom was complemented by active language practice outside class. Osaka University's new curriculum reflects this insight, for out-of-class learning in Practical English courses has aspects of form-focused training, and face-to-face Integrated English classes utilise more creative approaches such as project-based academic presentation. The roles taken by classroom teaching and by independent study in the Osaka University curriculum may be the reverse of the examples researched by Lai et al. (2015), but the validity of complementarity is an understanding common to both.

Practical English, as part of the new curriculum, started in the autumn of 2019 based on these grounds and justifications. It uses a commercially available learning programme called NetAcademy Next provided by ALC Inc. Practical English (Introductory e-Learning) employs the Integrated Training Advanced Course, a sub-course of NetAcademy Next, and Practical English (Advanced e-Learning) requires students to study another sub-course, the TOEFL-ITP Training Course. The Integrated Training Advanced Course spans a broad range of topics and content from the English used in everyday situations to that in semi-academic settings. The TOEFL-ITP Training Course is self-

explanatory. This sub-course focuses on academic English so as to give learners training preparing them to take this proficiency test. Both sub-courses are characterised by a well-rounded structure that includes text reading, listening exercises, dictation, grammar questions, and pronunciation-speaking drills in the form of reading out texts and simulated role-playing. Learners' progress can be monitored through the built-in LMS.

Grading is based on progress-performance records available from the LMS, weekly quizzes separately posted on Blackboard, and the TOEFL ITP test administered once a semester. As of March 2021, Practical English has been taught for three semesters. Introductory e-Learning was offered in Fall-Winter 2019, Advanced e-Learning in Spring-Summer 2020, and Introductory e-Learning again in Fall-Winter 2020. A supplementary course for re-takers has been instituted since Spring-Summer 2020. So far, 7,579 students have taken Introductory e-Learning, approximately 81% of them successfully acquiring credits; 3,694 have taken Advanced e-Learning, of whom 83.4% have earned credits.

Both the Introductory and Advanced courses have achieved improvement in student performance. The average TOEFL ITP score for 2019 was 8 points higher than the previous seven-year average. In 2020 the average score increased further, exceeding the previous seven-year average by 11 points. Taking into account the standard error of measurement on TOEFL ITP, approximately 10, these results cannot necessarily be regarded as decisive, but given this continued improvement in scores two years in a row, an upward trend is indicated. Section-specific data shows that the students who took Practical English performed particularly well in Section 1, Listening, scoring 20 points higher than the previous seven-year average. Their scores are about the same as in previous years for Section 2, Structure and Written Expression. The students' performance seemed to have slightly improved for Section 3, Reading, but the difference is within the range of error.¹

Practical English has, thus, functioned to a certain extent, meeting some of the objectives it was intended for. Still, it has challenges. In the next two sections, I describe one of the significant problems to have emerged while administering the courses, “dishonest learning,” and measures employed to counter this unfortunate student behaviour.

Fighting Cheats: Efforts to Minimise “Dishonest” Learning

When language teaching relies on autonomous study, a variety of difficulties arises. Deficiency in motivation and low completion rates have already been pointed out. From the perspective of course administrators, irregular student behaviours are also a serious problem. Suzuki (2011) highlights the case of “rush study,” in which course participants try to finish coursework in a very short period immediately before the deadline. By ignoring the set study schedule, rush study can impair the

¹ The precise numbers and values related to student records are regarded by the university as confidential. Hence only approximate ratios and verbal descriptions are given.

expected learning. This is not the only irregularity that can thwart learning and impact course administration. Osaka University's Practical English has encountered another conspicuous student behaviour: dishonest learning. Since this irregularity seems to be rooted in the very nature of online study, focused discussion is in order.

From the start of Practical English, peculiar behaviours of students were observed. The course requires participants to commit 3 to 5 hours to study every week for fifteen weeks until completion of the course. However, a few students were found to have finished the courseware within a week after the commencement of the semester. These students had completed their studies at an extremely fast pace, answering questions without much thought and doing exercises indifferently. By investigating student actions carefully, the course administrators detected signs of impermissible study practices. Some hopped ahead with dictation exercises by just entering a single letter or word in the answer box. Some skipped pronunciation-speaking sections by avoiding the requirement of recording their voice on the system. The tech-savvy proceeded with the course doubly or trebly fast by using two or more computer terminals concurrently. In some cases, students boasted of their cleverness on SNSs by proudly giving their friends tips for such smart cheating. The teachers became seriously concerned that leaving these illicit behaviours unaddressed might lead to low morale, lack of motivation, and deteriorations in learning outcomes. Something needed to be done.

The measures to be taken were fairly clear. The teachers realised that they had to detect dishonest learners and give them a warning so that they would redo the inappropriately answered parts. It was also decided that if a certain degree of dishonest learning remained at the end of the semester, points should be deducted, and in truly malicious cases, grades should be withheld. This was not easy, however. As the teaching team did not include IT experts, developing and implementing an automated irregularity warning system, as Nagoya University had done, was not an option. There was no other choice than to mobilise human resources. Thus, 9 teaching assistants were specially commissioned to deal with this issue. Spending about 500 man-hours per semester, they examined possible problem areas: multiple choices, pronunciation-speaking recordings, dictation transcripts, and others. The method of examination was straightforward. They manually scrutinized each part to see if there were unusually low multiple-choice scores, improper recordings, indifferently done dictation exercises, and the like. The sheer volume of work was a challenge, but the teaching assistants managed to examine most of the parts at issue.

Below are a few examples of the irregularities observed during the past three semesters.² In Step 6 of each unit on the Integrated Training Advanced Course, sentences are dictated for students to type in designated boxes. This is an honest example retrieved in a MS Excel format:

² Student data is not directly cited for reasons related to research ethics. The images below are simulated tables made by the current author. They, however, reflect the essence of student practice.

STEP06 あなたの答え(--:履歴なし)	STEP06 正解(--:履歴なし)
Did you know they're opening a new shopping conperpts?,It's a post have a lot of ca	Did you know they're opening a new shopping complex?,It's supposed to
Here, have an energy drink.,They seem unnatural, like medicine or something.,Ever	Here, have an energy drink.,They seem unnatural, like medicine or somet
--	--
--	--
You guys jearn lots of kanji though your education, don't you?,I can't remember thi	You guys learn lots of kanji through your education, don't you?,I can't rem
We've got a show for you this morning,Avoid the chaos and live in styles with Andr	We've got a show for you this morning packed with everything you need t


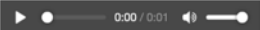
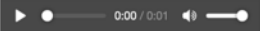
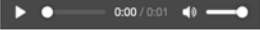
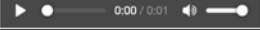
In contrast, dishonest learning produces markedly different results like the following:

STEP06 あなたの答え(--:履歴なし)	STEP06 正解(--:履歴なし)
Here,,They seem unnatural,like medicine or something.,Everyo	Here, have an energy drink.,They seem unnatural, like med
a,a,a,a,a	You guys learn lots of kanji through your education, don't
a,aa,a,a,a]a	We've got a show for you this morning packed with everyt
a,a,a,a,a	We've got a show for you this morning packed with everyt

If the learner skips the exercises, there is no record left:

--	--	--
--	--	--
--	--	--
--	--	--
--	--	--

As stated, pronunciation-speaking exercises require learners to record their voice on the system. Illicit practice in these sections shows several patterns. Instead of their own voice, learners record television sounds, voices from YouTube, or snatches of music. Some people apparently asked their friends to stand in, as voices from different speakers were sometimes found to be recorded. In more blatant instances, male voices were recorded on a female student's learning site, and vice versa. Japanese utterances are sometimes recorded when students should read out English sentences. Others even circumvented the whole exercises. Note that in the table below, the recorded durations all indicate a minimum length of 0:01, or a hundredth of a second, clear evidence of no practice.

問題番号 / Number	練習回数 / Times Practiced	音声 / Voice	英文 / Sentence
1	0	 0:00 / 0:01	Our athletic department holds a bazaar every year to raise funds for our school's women's sports teams.
2	0	 0:00 / 0:01	Starting at 7 o'clock and going on until midnight there will be performances by six local bands.
3	0	 0:00 / 0:01	Well, I wasn't, but now that you mention it, would you care to dance with me later?
4	0	 0:00 / 0:01	I've got to do some studying in the library before I can come to the bazaar, though.
5	0	 0:00 / 0:01	I'll meet you in front of the stage at 8:00.

Dishonesty hunting started early in the Fall-Winter semester of 2019, shortly after Practical English was introduced. As reported below, the investigation has contributed significantly to correcting student behaviour.

Reduced Rate of Cheats and Failures

Countermeasures against dishonesty are tedious work. All those concerned agree that, if

possible, other methods should be developed. Nonetheless, the current manual method has had a significant impact in visibly improved student behaviour. Again, it is not possible to quote precise numbers and values for reasons of confidentiality, but it can be said that cases of failure due to dishonest learning have constantly decreased each semester. The number of those who failed because of illicit learning in the Fall-Winter semester 2020 was less than half those in the corresponding semester of 2019. Students have become more aware of the risk of dishonest study as the strict attitude of the teacher is now widely known, probably via SNS, word of mouth, or other means in student communities.

Failure by dishonesty leads to retaking the same course, and for students belonging to particular schools, such as Medicine, Dentistry or Pharmacology, this can be a negative factor in the faculty's decision whether to promote them from their second year to the third. Quite a few students from these schools actually repeated their second year in 2020 after failing Practical English in 2019 for dishonest practice. The teacher side is, thus, obliged to continue investigating learning records to detect dishonesty. It is also important to encourage students to address an enquiry email to the administrators, however small the matter in question seems. Some students tend to skip voice recording and other technically demanding exercises when they encounter a small degree of difficulty in site operation. Since innocent negligence on a whim might affect one's credit and even promotion to the next year, students should be advised to consult the teachers whenever a problem or concern comes up in their online study.

Afterword: Work Yet to Be Done

When operating autonomous study courses, the teachers cannot expect all aspects to function satisfactorily. Online language courses, when offered as compulsory subjects, are generally unpopular among students. Personal communications from colleagues of other universities often recount low evaluation of such courses by students.³ Negative feelings about Practical English were already observed in the first few months of its introduction. Student questionnaires, administered several times in the past year and half, show their discontent in various areas of these courses. Some referred to vaguely negative feelings, and others complained about the large volume of study assigned each week. On detecting dishonest behaviours, the administrators sent out a warning that such irregularities would not be tolerated and might have serious consequences. Students did not seem to be amused by this, even when they knew that they themselves should be blamed. In addition, many were not satisfied with the courseware, especially those exercises and questions linked to everyday situations. They

³ An instance of such communications is a discussion held with Professor Yubun Suzuki, Dean of the Faculty of Languages and Cultures, Kyushu University, at his office on 20 December 2019. Nagoya University teaching staff spoke of a similar student perception, but the precise date and other related information are not on record.

tended to regard such exercises as not up to their academic level. Drill factors, such as simply reading out texts twice or three times or typing in words and sentences, were felt to be rather childish as well. There is a gap here between student perception and the thinking of the teachers. The latter recognise the importance of repetitive exercises, review of already acquired vocabulary, and simple pattern practice.

However, there are signs of improvement. The student questionnaire of 2019 indicated that as many as 76% of the respondents bore negative feelings about Practical English, whereas the survey conducted a year later found that the discontent rate was reduced to 63%. The university's annual roundtable with student representatives showed a similar improvement in student sentiments. The 2019 roundtable was mostly an occasion of accusation against Practical English, but in 2020, there was a marked increase in neutral or favourable comments on the same course, and some of the participants became convinced of the significance of drills and review of the basics once the university side explained the pedagogical grounds of the course. With the COVID-19 pandemic, studying online for university courses has now been received as everyday practice. This also may have been a factor in the better student reception.

That said, there is work yet to be done. Student sentiments must be improved further, as they are still relatively negative. Considering that the improvement in scores on TOEFL ITP has been barely significant, students' proficiency level should be raised higher. Ideally, dishonest learning should be corrected not by external monitoring but by the enhancement of learner motivation. Better courseware and more appropriate study methods need to be explored. It is to be hoped that with these efforts, online independent study will mature as university subjects in the not very distant future.

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